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ABSTRACT

The bidialectal freshman handbook will be the next gimmick of textbook companies, even though they will contain nothing new and will foster several fallacies. The information will be questionable, factually inaccurate and unsound because while no linguist has really been able to define dialect, linguists claim to have knowledge about the structure of a second dialect. There is no adequate theory to allow for a thorough comparison of dialects, and educators feel that English orthography is either phonetic or phonemic, instead of recognizing that spelling represents a level of phonology in which each morpheme is assigned an abstract phonological representation. Spelling is uniquely related to standard American pronunciation and departure is an interference. However, the word "bidialectal" will sell these textbooks. (SW)

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BIDIALECTAL FRESHMAN HANDBOOKS--
THE NEXT FLIM-FLAM

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BIDIALECTAL FRESHMAN HANDBOOKS--
THE NEXT FLIM-FLAM

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In his recent review of two composition texts--one over-priced at $6, lavishly advertised, but containing ideas as old and stale as last week's coffee; the other reasonably priced at a buck-fifty, virtually unadvertised (and unnoticed!), but packed with provocative new ideas about developing writing abilities--Richard Larson asked these questions:

> Is freshman English composition the only academic subject for which writers of textbooks continue to publish virtually the same ideas and to offer almost exactly the same advice, year after year after year? Is English composition the only field in which apparent contributions to the state of the art are of such uncertain value that writers of texts can ignore those contributions with impunity? Is composition the only field so barren of good new information and ideas that a slight difference in structure and some improvement in style are enough to justify confronting text-selection committees with still another book that restates the same teachings we have offered our students for a couple of decades? (1974:66)

The implied answers to Larson's questions are both obvious and correct.

A few weeks ago when a book salesman asked if he could send me any books, I replied that if his firm had anything honestly new and different, I would like to see it, but if not he should not waste natural resources and human energy by sending me books which should never have

been published in the first place. Naturally, he said he did have a new book, which he named. I had seen the book already. It is spectacularly advertised with comic-strip characters, its cover has a psychedelic design in blinding chartreuse and day-glo orange ink, and inside it is the same old stuff you have seen in hundreds of other freshman composition texts. (Actually the book reminds me a great deal of the old gal who wrote it--a grandmother-type who wears miniskirts.) By the way, I declined the honor of a complimentary copy.

But this is the situation we composition teachers face. Unhappy with the results of our courses, we search vainly in the avalanche of textbooks for the rare ones that do offer something new. But truly innovative books like Macrorie's Telling Writing, Friederich and Kuester's It's Mine and I'll Write It That Way, and Elbow's Writing Without Teachers tend to get buried in the rubble. If a book does get our attention, chances are that it is because of hard-sell advertising and fraudulent claims of merit, not because of the book's worth. Make no mistake about it: those ad men know us well, and they know we are always suckers for claimed panaceas.

And like old dogs, we never learn. Even though the last one didn't work either, we give every new gimmick a chance. We have been through everything from the stodgy structural and tedious transformational grammar composition handbooks to the non-book books with a few mind trip, let it all hang out, hip, stoned, mixed bag, pastiche, comic, and non-verbal books in between. So what is the next gimmick? I'll lay money on the bidialectal freshman handbook.

Despite the fact that Jim Sledd and a few others have dared to expose the oral bidialectalism proposals for the frauds that they are, English teachers will be English teachers, and sooner or later someone will be un-

able to resist the temptation of hitting the lucrative freshman composition textbook market with a so-called bidialectal handbook. We can be sure the book will get the Big Push. Publishing house hucksters and academic propagandists will tout this kind of book as a revolution in the teaching of composition, as the hottest type of book in the field, and as a bold new approach to solving an old and difficult problem. Those of us who are perennially dissatisfied with our composition programs--especially if we are teaching in community colleges, junior colleges, or state universities with open-door policies which let Them into our freshman English classes--will be lured by slick advertising. But we must be forewarned as to what to expect from such books. Judging from oral bidialectal programs that have been ballyhood in the past, we can expect the bidialectal handbooks to be ideologically questionable, theoretically bankrupt, factually inaccurate, and pedagogically unsound.

Bidialectalism, like eradication, is predicated on cultural elitism. It is not only racist but also anti-lower- and working-class to advocate that all Americans must model their language after that of the whites who have social power and prestige in America. To argue that students ought to learn this standard English solely because it is the language of the economically and socially dominant is fundamentally undemocratic. If it is mandatory, this policy should be legally contested, for dialectism is no more tolerable than either racism or sexism. If it is optional, it should be opposed as intellectually and morally indefensible. Such linguistic engineering does not have a place in a truly democratic society. But the ideological question is just that--a question, and your answer to it will be determined by your views of society. Whether or not you think the economically and socially oppressed should be coerced, cajoled, or

compelled to ape the white ruling class depends upon your view of society, upon your position with regard to democracy, freedom, and equality.

But regardless of our different social viewpoints we all ought to agree that such an educational innovation as a bidialectal composition course ought to have solid theoretical foundations. (Though I can almost hear the demur that it is discriminatory to make this demand of this program when no such criterion is applied to any other writing program, I will ignore this baseless protest.) First, let's consider what does it mean to be bidialectal. Bidialectal means having competence in two dialects of the same language, and presumably in a writing program the stress is upon productive rather than receptive competence. (See Troike 1969 for an explanation of productive competence and receptive competence.) Such a program must assume that the student is competent in one dialect to start with, but whether or not it also assumes receptive competence in the second dialect is a good question. It deserves an answer because that answer clearly determines exactly what the bidialectal program is designed to teach. Troike (1969) and Labov and Cohen (1967) have established without question that receptive bidialectism is widespread already among some Americans--and without the benefit of bidialectal courses, I must add!--and that evidence of this receptive knowledge signifies that these people already know a great deal about the structure of a second dialect.

Assume that there are bidialectal persons with only receptive competence or with both receptive and productive comptence in the second dialect; it does not matter. They "know" two dialects, but we don't know what they know! We do not know what people have to learn in order to acquire competence in a second dialect because we do not know, except in the most trivial ways, how dialects differ. As a linguist whose field of expertise is dialectology, I am compelled to say that we linguists have never succeeded in

defining dialect. Every attempt to account for dialect--whether it is Trager and Smith's (1951) overall pattern, Weinreich's (1954) diasystem, or any of the proposals of generative linguists--has failed to define dialect in any non-ad hoc, theoretically valid manner. Sledd's criticism of programs that are based on "an unsystematic list of shibboleths" (1969:1311) is valid, but it does not go far enough. The point is not that we lack complete systematic comparisons of dialects; it is that we do not have an adequate theory to allow us to make any systematic comparisons.

The two preceding points could be made with regard to oral bidialectal programs as well as bidialectal writing programs, but developers of writing programs have still more bears to wrestle. A basic issue confronting the bidialectalist--or any teacher of writing, for that matter--is the relationship between speech and writing. Does the bidialectal writing program assume that oral competence in a dialect must precede written competence? Some materials I have seen do make this assumption, just as some oral bidialectalists argue that children must learn to speak standard English before they learn to read it. Both are outrageously wrong-headed. Common sense, to say nothing of graphemic theory, tells us it is stupid to think that written skills are dependent on oral ones. We all can spell or read with understanding words we cannot pronounce, and we may be able to write in a foreign language that we cannot speak, and deaf mutes are not doomed to illiteracy. I submit that I <u>can</u> write standard English, yet some of my colleagues in the Department of English at The University of Texas at Austin adamantly insist that I <u>cannot</u> speak it.

Perhaps the problem is that the developers of bidialectal materials, as well as a great many other people, have grossly misunderstood the structural linguists' old cliche that speech is primary and writing secondary.

They have wrongly interpreted this statement to mean in terms of contemporary grammatical theory that orthographic rules apply to the output of phonological rules. That interpretation is made on the basis of a flawed but widespread notion of our writing system. The seriousness of the problem can be seen by looking at the schematic representation of a grammar. (See Fig. 1.) The semantic or conceptual structures underlying language are still poorly understood, but regardless of how they are formulated, transformational rules are applied to them to rearrange, delete, or add constituents and to supply various non-lexical morphemes (for, that, to, etc.) At this stage the lexicon provides those morphemes which have lexical meaning (e.g., nouns and verbs). The resulting structure, known as syntactic surface structure, contains all the morphemes of a sentence linearly ordered and specifies their relationship to each other. Each lexical morpheme is provided by the lexicon with an abstract phonological representation, but grammatical morphemes such as PAST, PERFECT, PRESENT, PLURAL, etc. do not have phonological representations when they are generated by transformational rules. Instead, such morphemes have phonological forms assigned by rules that add the shape appropriate to the subclass of noun or verb the morpheme is attached to. In other words, the grammatical formatives PRESENT AND PLURAL, for example, are both assigned the phonological features $\begin{bmatrix} \langle +\text{anterior} \rangle \\ \langle +\text{coronal} \rangle \\ \langle +\text{strident} \rangle \end{bmatrix}$ whenever the lexical morpheme has the necessary features to trigger such a rule (e.g., ⟨+singular⟩, ⟨+III⟩ for verbs or ⟨+unmarked⟩ or whatever for nouns). The point is that all English dialects have morphemes such as PRESENT, PAST, or PLURAL. These rules, whether they are readjustment rules, morphological rules, or whatever, replace an abstract formative such as PLURAL with a specified phonological shape. Phonological rules operate on syntactic surface structures to map those abstract phonolo-

gical representations into pronunciations. Orthographic rules also operate on those same syntactic surface structures to map those underlying phonological representations into their spelled forms; they do not operate on the output of the phonological rules.

It should be stressed that neither orthography nor pronunciation is secondary to or derived from the other, for orthography is closely tied to the morphophonemic structure of lexemes specified in the syntactic surface structure--not to phonetic structure. Since English orthography is essentially morphophonemic, universal English orthographic rules can be learned by any speaker of the language without having to learn any particular phonological rules. Even deaf mutes can do it. The consequences of this realization should not be taken lightly, for they have profound significance for any talk of bidialectal composition handbooks. Regardless of pronunciation differences from dialect to dialect, if speakers of different dialects share identical syntactic surface structures and if the underlying phonological shape of a morpheme is identical for all dialects, then orthographic rules for all speakers are identical and can be taught uniformly regardless of how multiplied the dialect diversity is. Thus when we teach students to write the past tense form of, say, walk as walked, we do not teach them a grammatical rule for tense; all we teach them is that no matter how that abstract segment PAST is pronounced, it is spelled -ed.

But what if neither of those conditions is met? What if syntactic surface structures are not identical? Then there is an honest grammatical difference, which I insist should not be tampered with. No teaching problem exists. What if the underlying phonological shape of a morpheme is not universal in a language? This is a serious theoretical question which Campbell (1972) accurately calls the dilemma of generative dialectology. If

speakers of different dialects do not share identical phonological shapes of semantically identical morphemes, then different orthographic rules are necessary, and the task is simply to write those rules and then teach them. These are the kinds of theoretical questions the authors of basic writing textbooks, whether bidialectal or not, must address themselves to, and judging from my experience none of them have, do, or will. Until they do, their books are plainly theoretically bankrupt.

Bidialectalists, however, never seem to concern themselves with such necessary theoretical questions, and in addition they are prone to make the fundamentally wrong assumption that English orthography is either phonetic or phonemic instead of recognizing that spellings reflect an abstract but linguistically justifiable level of phonology in which each morpheme is assigned an abstract phonological representation. When phonological differences in dialects are responsible for spelling errors, this happens because our spelling instruction is based upon mistaken views of sound-spelling relationships. Failing to realize this, the bidialectalist assumes that standard spelling is uniquely related to standard American pronunciation and that departures are due to interference. Thus Wolfram and Whiteman write:

> In the sense that the written message is usually a reflection of the spoken one, we may expect written interference to approximate spoken interference. (1971:35)

Crystal makes the same mistake when she claims that the students' problem is "the degree to which their spoken language, which is inevitably reflected in their writing, deviates from what is considered standard"(1972:45). There are two errors here. First, a person's pronunciation is not inevitably reflected in his writing, and second, deviations from orthographic conventions are not in proportion to how much one's speech departs from standard

American English. But having made those invalid claims, Crystal goes on:

> If we accept the proposition that many students do poorly in composition because of dialect interference, ... colleges ... should attempt to equip these students with what is essentially a new skill: the ability to handle a second dialect or language. Only then can one expect to deal with the subtler problems of writing. (1972:45-46)

Here again is the false assertation that a person must have oral competence in standard American English before one can expect to write the language in the standard form. A moment's reflection exposes the absurdity of the argument. If Crystal's claim were true, how could she account for the fact that millions of Englishmen, Australians, New Zealanders, South Africans and other English-speaking people throughout the world write English in the standard manner without a speaking command of standard American English as a second dialect? Isn't it obvious that standard English orthography is not derived from the pronunciation of standard American English, or from any other dialect spoken today? Those conventions, excluding a few American eccentricities that were largely Noah Webster's brainchildren, were established long before a standard American English ever existed.

These statements about interference in writing make a fallacious comparison to speech. When people learn their native dialect, they learn the phonological rules of that dialect. Then when they attempt to learn a second dialect, they may transfer pronunciation rules from their native dialect to the new one they are learning. Thus when they attempt to speak one dialect with pronunciation features from another, the result is properly labelled "interference." But writing is different. Although

people learn dialect pronunciations, they do not learn dialect spellings. Orthographic rules, unlike phonological rules, are not integral aspects of any dialect system. They are independent and universal; therefore, while interference in speech is a natural phenomenon, written interference is not. If there is an "interference" problem, it stems from shoddy teaching, not from dialect differences. Since the English graphemic system is arbitrary, and since graphemes do not represent distinctive sounds, there is no reason for interference to occur. Let's take an obvious example--the letter r. We wrongly teach that this letter stands for the [r] sound. In some dialects, in some words, in some spellings, it may, but it may also stand for [ə], [ɸ], or [ɪ] as in fear, four, or bird, respectively. It may also stand for vowel length as in car. If people pronounce these words as [fɪə], [fo], [bɜɪd], and [kɑ:], they do not have to learn to pronounce them as [fɪr], [for], [bɜd], or [kar] in order to learn the conventional spellings. All they need to learn are orthographic rules and the relationship of these rules to their own pronunciation. Let me end the discussion on this point ironically with a quotation from Roger Shuy, one of the loudest advocates of bidialectalism:

> All of this is meant to indicate that there is nothing irregular about phoneme-grapheme relationships of speakers of nonstandard. The correspondences are quite similar in quantity but different in certain shapes. In terms of entire linguistic structures these differences are actually very slight. They gain in importance only as social groups assign values to them. (1969b: 123)

But a bidialectal handbook is forced to assume that spelling deviations such as the omission of d or ed on preterit verbs are and only are reflections of dialect deviations. The claim is that standard speakers

add ed or d to weak verbs because they add [d] or [t] or [ɪd] to the end when they talk and that non-standard speakers leave letters off because they do not pronounce such affixes. They should consider sentences such as these:

...it was never mention.

...a solution which was use, but...

It seem awful...

...it so hot...

...she feel like it...

I could add more from my files, but I won't. The point is that the people who write these sentences do not have uninflected third person singular verbs in their speech. Continuing to follow the bidialectalist's logic, how do we account for such written forms as these?

She would loved to be able...

...we used to have one.

...what was the mean of doing that?

...the fundamentals of actig.

...a time which a long or very short...

...I couldn't enjoyed any more...

...the less wording one.

Do the bidialectalists really suppose that the writers say:

[lʌvd tu]

[yuzd tu]

[ði min ɛv duɪŋ]

[æktɪg]

[hwɪt ə lɔŋ]

[kudnt ɛnjɔɪd ɛni]

[Its wrdig wan]?

If they do, they don't deserve to be taken seriously. If they don't, they need to re-think all their assumptions about interference. Maybe they even need to study a little more linguistics and a lot more dialects.

But think about that crucial assumption in a bidialectal handbook--the assumption that speakers of standard English learn to write standard English and that speakers of nonstandard English learn to write nonstandard English. Students using the bidialectal handbook will obviously be expected to recognize sentences written in their dialect and to contrast them with those in standard English. The first part of the assumption is flatly wrong. The important discovery in Geneva Smitherman's dissertation (1969) was that her Black students in Detroit did not write as they talked. Indeed, she discovered that their writing adhered more closely to the standard than did their speech. Even Smitherman's critics agree with her. In an otherwise silly response to Smitherman's "God Don't Never Change: Black English from a Black Perspective" Jean Hunt, a white lady from New England who Yankee school marms down South at Grambling College, in Louisiana, says that most of her students are "disadvantaged" (to use her word), most speak Black English, but "few can write it" (1974:122).

Even though the bidialectalists are wrong, ignore the facts for a minute and consider the claim that the goal of a bidialectal handbook is to help the student become a fluent bidialectal writer. If that claim is to be taken seriously, then the user of the handbook must expect to learn to command and to keep separated two written dialects. Let's pretend that the book truly does help students to command standard written English. Will it help them to command, say, nonstandard Black written English? How? Isn't the important assumption that they already command the written version of

their own nonstandard dialect? That's a very interesting assumption. How did they manage to do it? Certainly it was not taught to them in the public schools. How do they develop on their own a skill that we cannot teach? Instead of writing bidialectal handbooks the bidialectalists could perform a valuable public service by trying to discover how all these "deprived" kids manage such a remarkable feat. Then we might get some insight into how to teach all kids to write. But to revert to realism, we all know that bidialectism is not really the goal of such programs, because I suspect that most bidialectalists do not really care if kids are fluent in nonstandard dialects. What they really care about is teaching standard English, and those who are not in the mainstream are once again the victims of a white middle class con game.

Let us not forget that if a book is ever going to justify a publisher's investment it must claim to reach a wide audience. It can't be restricted to Blacks in Detroit, Appalachian whites in Chicago, or Chicanos in San Antonio. It has got to reach all of them and everyone else who does not speak the language of our Anglo (that's Texan for white) ruling class. Remember, too, that a bidialectal handbook has to keep contrasting standard dialect with vernacular dialect (VD!)--or whatever. Think of the impossibility of the task. Every exercise has to have in it examples of VD which the student is supposed to recognize, remember, so he can learn to translate. People will claim to write such a book, but no one will. No one knows enough. So what will happen? We all know who the book will really be for, but it wouldn't be polite or political for the authors to say it--Blacks. But if the book is to be designed for such a diversified audience, then in the contrastive drills VD will either contain such a bewildering array of diversity that it will only confuse the students trying to find their own dialect features represented, or--and this is more likely--

the book will rely on what Sledd called that "unsystematic list of shibboleths." Anyone who has kept up with the articles on nonstandard English during the past decade knows that these shibboleths are found in Black English. When that is the case, a Chicano or a Southern rural white (like me, or like I used to be) will find lip service only, for there is no way these people can identify their language with the language they will find in the book. They will be told that their language is not standard, yet they will not find their language illustrated in the exercises. While it may make pedagogical sense, though that is questionable, to treat Black and white nonstandard speakers as a group, by what logic can the problems of bilinguals be lumped into the same VDM

Bidialectal handbooks, no doubt, will claim to be based on EFL techniques. We should know by now that those EFL techniques are pretty dubious enterprises in themselves. Again I turn to Shuy:

> A majority of the materials currently available for teaching standard English to nonstandard speakers rest [sic] on the uneasy assumption that TESOL techniques are valid for learning a second dialect. They do this without any solid proof. We do not have a viable evaluation tool at this time nor are we likely to get one until the linguists complete their analysis of the language system of nonstandard speakers (1969a:83).

Notice that Shuy says we do not have the tools now and we aren't likely to get them, yet that will not stop bidialectalists from claiming to use TESOL techniques. Actually, I am probably making too much of the claim for EFL methodology, for it is just a claim. About the only differences between many Standard-English-as-a-Second-Dialect materials and old fashioned grammars is that what were once called "incorrect," "wrong," or "ungrammatical"

are now labelled "vernacular dialect," and what were called "correct," "right," or "grammatical" sentences are now called "standard dialect." Otherwise, the character of the explanations and the nature of the exercises are all very familiar. It's Harbrace College Handbook all over again. The change in attitude is some improvement, but not much.

Finally, another fallacy of bidialectal materials is no more than plain old false disjunction. In order to contrast VD with standard English, writers are forced to presuppose a monolithic standard, and the result is that an awfully lot of standard English is branded as VD simply because the writers are ignorant of variation in standard English or because they choose to distort facts for the sake of convenience. Such materials give a dichotomy between standard English and VD which repeatedly and erroneously suggests that given a grammatical feature (say, verb tense) the two have nothing in common. In standard dialect present tense verbs with third person singular subjects, we are told, are marked by an inflectional ending, but these are uninflected in VD, or so we are told. This dichotomy is repeated again and again. What nonsense! First of all, this presentation wrongly exaggerates the magnitude of dialect differences when people who study dialects know very well that dialect differences are actually very minor and linguistically superficial. Second, nonstandard dialects do share features with standard ones, but bidialectal materials lead us to conclude otherwise. Third, the contrasting paradigms ignore variability in standard as well as nonstandard dialects. For example, in some standard and nonstandard dialects alike speakers alternate between $\emptyset$ past tense markers and overt inflectional endings, to take just one case. Fourth, what is the student supposed to conclude? He says to himself, "Sure I put s's on verbs like that. I guess I speak standard English. What the hell am I doing here?" But then he says, "Naw, I say come instead of

c'

came, so maybe I am a VD person." But the more he thinks about it, he says to himself, "Wait a minute, I can't be a VD person and standard English person at the same time. I wouldn't be in this class if I was! Come to think of it, I'm not either one! Christ, it was bad enough to be told I don't know standard English, but now it looks like I'm so dumb I don't know VD either. Here I am, an 18 year-old dummy. I can't do nothing right. The longer I stay in school, the more these teachers and books tell me how stupid I am. I'm getting out of this crap." So the open door swings again as he leaves saying, "Adios, Mister Franklin!"

Let me close with two quotations from colleagues at The University of Texas at Austin. Possibly neither has ever heard of bidialectalism. If they have heard the term, I doubt they know what it means. Nevertheless their point of view is precisely that that a bidialectalist subscribes to. Here is the first one from a handout given to students:[1]

> Black English is a respectable dialect, but it is not acceptable on tests, exams, papers in a university like this one. If you are a black, you only handicap yourself if you do not learn to speak and write the language (or dialect) of the whites--white English--i.e., reasonably decent, correct, conventional, modern English, the same kind of English that every student in the University is supposed to use in all his (her) courses (as the Catalogue states somewhere) which is reasonable enough to expect of any student who has been admitted into a college or university. If a student doesn't think so, or is unwilling to or incapable of learning to speak and write such English, he (she) doesn't belong in college but in a trade

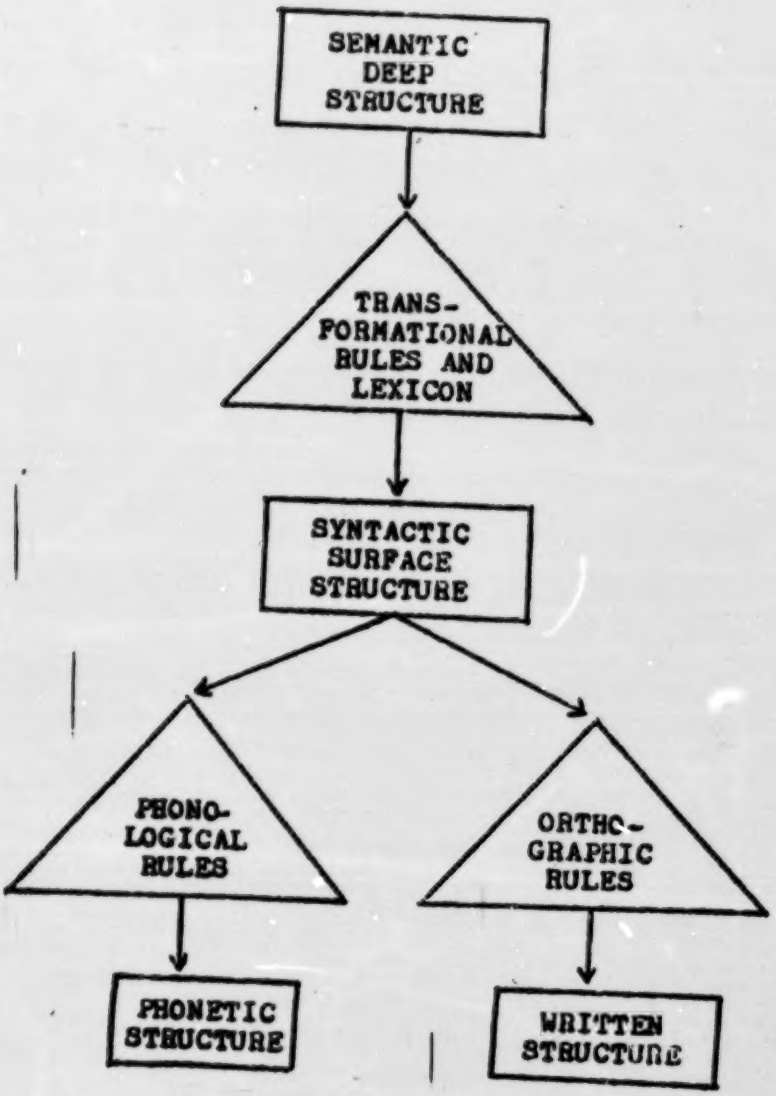
[1] For full appreciation of their irony, both statements are reproduced (without [sic]s) exactly as their authors wrote them.

school or a vetinarian school or a beauty school, or should be driving a truck, clerking in a store, babysitting.

Now here is the other one, which comes from a course syllabus for teachers of freshman composition:

> ...you should certainly penalize severely if necessary, a student who persists in ignoring the niceties of punctuation, spelling, and sentence construction. Writing responsibly includes taking the time and care to write the language correctly and decently and no student, however bright, can continue to ignore this obligation and expect to be respected and paid attention to.

With people like this, with Ph.D. degrees in English, so-called humanists, teaching in my university, is it any wonder that HEW is currently investigating The University of Texas at Austin because of allegations of institutionalized discrimination against minorities? Don't we have higher goals, better things to do than to demand that our students write in the standard English of Richard Milhous Nixon and his crowd of white-collar crooks? Compare any of Nixon's speeches and their "reasonably decent, correct, conventional" standard English with Vanzetti's letters from prison and their broken English and ask yourself just how important it is "to write the language correctly and decently." We should forget about our excessive concern for petty "niceties" of standard English and start teaching something that is important. Or we should abolish our courses and then abolish our jobs, for in the immortal words of Pogo's friend, Porky Pine, "We have met the enemy--and HE is US."



TRANSFORMATIONAL RULES: Rearrange, delete, or add constituents and supply non-lexical morphemes

LEXICON: Provides morphemes with lexical meaning

SYNTACTIC SURFACE STRUCTURE: Contains all the morphemes of a sentence

PHONOLOGICAL RULES: Map abstract phonological representations of morphemes into pronunciations

ORTHOGRAPHIC RULES: Map underlying phonological representations into spelled forms

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